Vaccinations nearly complete

Area still free of VEE

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While the Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis (VEE) epidemic plagues southern and western Texas, the extreme northeast corner of the state and the southwest corner of Arkansas remain free of any reported cases of the deadly sleeping sickness among horses.

Dr. Jim Hall, Veterinary Medical Officer of the Animal Health Division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture said the Texarkana, Tex., distribution point, which provides vaccine for Bowie, Titus, Cass and Red River Counties, has issued about 15,000 units of the VEE vaccine, 5,000 units distributed in Bowie County.

Dr. Hall and Federal Livestock Inspector H. T. Holcombe estimate that the state-federal VEE innoculation program has reached about 4,500 horses in Bowie County. He said they expect to innoculate about 500 more before the program ends in Bowie County, a date yet uncertain.

"We're winding up pretty good now," Dr. Hall said, "but a lot of people who are isolated have not heard about it."

Dr. Hall said the quarantine-to-premises will continue indefinitely for horses not vaccinated for VEE. He said several Bowie County residents have refused innoculation for their horses out of fear of adverse side effects of the yet — experimental vaccine. No serious side effects from the vaccine have been reported in any of the four counties, Dr. Hall said.

Bowie County Agricultural Agent Herman Lynch of Boston, Tex., and Dr. V. B. Bird of DeKalb, Tex., said they estimate 95 per cent of Bowie County's horses have been vaccinated. They said the innoculation programs in Bowie and in Red River, Titus and Cass Counties, are continuing as they have since July 19, when the VEE innoculation program was made a joint-state-federal project, with the federal government supplying the vaccine and paying veterinarians a flat fee of $4 per head.

Dr. Bird said veterinarians participating in the program signed an agreement with the state that no charge would be levied on a houseowner by a veterinarian for innoculation service.

He said the only time veterinarians charged for VEE innoculations was the first day of the "official" epidemic, July 18. At that time, he said, veterinarians charged only for mileage in travel, and the rates varied among veterinarians.

"No credited veterinarian in this county is now charging for VEE innoculations, as far as I know," Dr. Bird said.

About 2,100 horses have been vaccinated in Miller County, according to assistant Miller County Agricultural Agent Roger Bates. He said the program has only been in operation for about eight days.

"We're not getting too many calls now," Bates said. "We were scheduled to vaccinate only 20 head Saturday, and I've been taking Saturday calls all week."

"We're in real good shape right now, but I'm not sure how long vaccine will be available from Magnolia," Bates said.

Bates said horses that have been vaccinated must undergo a 14-day quarantine period. After that, he said, they can be transported anywhere in the State of Arkansas.

Bates said terms of the Arkansas quarantine are unclear as to what will happen to horses that are not vaccinated. He said at this point, horses that are not vaccinated are still under the overall quarantine to premises, and will be for an indefinite time. Should the quarantine for the state be lifted, he said, it is unclear whether the unvaccinated horses will still be quarantined, or will be free to be transported anywhere in the state.

He said several Miller County residents have refused innoculation for their horses, fearing adverse side effects to the vaccine.

"So far, we have had two cases of reaction to the vaccine by horses — one near Revanna and one in Texarkana. The horses ran a high temperature and began to stagger when they walked. One horse — the one in Texarkana — fell down. We have taken blood tests from this animal, but the results are not back yet. Thursday afternoon after it fell, it began to gain strength and was eating and doing alright," Bates said.

"I want to warn all Miller County horseowners not to work or exercise their horses for a 72-hour period after the vaccination. During this time, the horse will run a high body temperature and should not be exercised," he said.

Bates said the vaccinations at 26 clinics in Miller county in the past week, plus home calls with local veterinarians set up through the extension office had been given free of charge.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has cleared the VEE vaccine for limited commercial production, according to department officials. They said it will be available for commercial use in about four weeks, if the vaccine passes standard tests.

So far, the vaccine is still termed experimental. It was developed some years ago by the Army in connection with experimentation on a biological warfare project.

Crown makes no difference

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Negligence charges filed